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The use of extended piano techniques at conservatories in Turkey

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Abstract

Although the use of extended piano techniques were relatively uncommon in the common practice period (c.1600 - 1900), the use of extended skills became more common in modern classical music since 1900. Composers in modern Turkey also use these techniques in their works. This study analyzed the role of extended-technique piano repertoire in the pedagogical approaches of instructors at conservatoires. Results indicated that these techniques were not widely taught and the repertoire was not widely performed. The most prominent challenges in the teaching of this repertoire were found to emerge at the phase of application. Thus, the study analyzed applications and problems observed in conservatoires in Turkey regarding the use of extended piano techniques, and it investigated how these problems can be resolved.

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Keywords: Piano education; extended piano techniques; piano repertoire; conservatory; Turkey.

1. Introduction

As in many countries, music education is divided into three types in Turkey: (a) general music education, (b) amateur music education, and (c) professional music education. Professional music education is given to individuals who want to be trained as professional musicians. At the university level, professional music education is provided in the following main areas: to train composers or performers at conservatories; to train the same types of musicians as in conservatories and music scholars (e. g. musicologists) at schools of fine arts; to train musical instrument makers at conservatories and at music teacher training schools; and to train military band musicians at Ankara State Conservatory and at the Military Music School in Ankara. There are currently twenty-four conservatories, twenty-three colleges of fine arts (at the university level), and twenty-three music teacher training schools in Turkey.² Fourteen of the conservatories offer studies in classic music. There are different departments and branches of fine arts for educating young talents in conservatories. These institutions offer programs for pianists and teach necessary techniques to prospective artists.

"Extended techniques" are performance techniques used in music to describe unconventional, unorthodox or "improper" techniques of singing, or of playing musical instruments. Although the use of extended technique was relatively uncommon in the common practice period (c. 1600 - 1900), extended techniques are more common in

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² Akbulut, Ş. (2009), *Correpetition as the Problem at Turkish Music Teacher Training Schools*, ACE, Osaka Japan

modern classical music since about 1900. Most contemporary composers strive to explore the timbral possibilities of different instruments, cooperating with musicians in order to expand the "vocabulary" of given instruments. This practice undoubtedly increases the diversity of instrumental colors for contemporary pieces. Piano extended techniques are those in which unorthodox or unconventional techniques are used to create the sound.³

Although there are myriad techniques which can be classified in different fashions, extended techniques can be briefly described as follows:

- “Prepared piano” which involves introducing foreign objects into the workings of the piano in order to change the sound quality; this technique may involve using a piece of paper, a letter opener, a glass rod or a plectrum on the strings. For example, John Milton Cage Jr.⁴ wrote numerous dance-related works and a few concert pieces, the best known of which is *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946-1948). George Crumb⁵ is also noted as an explorer of unusual timbres and extended techniques. Examples include the use of spoken flute (one speaks while blowing into the instrument) and glass marbles poured into an open piano. The following compositions of Crumb can be cited as examples: *Makrokosmos, Volume I* (1972), for amplified piano; *Makrokosmos, Volume II* (1973), for amplified piano; *Voice of the Whale* for electric flute, electric cello, and amplified piano (1971) - *Proterozoic* (Var. II) (apply paper clip to vibrating string).⁶
- “String piano” means hitting or plucking the strings directly or any other direct manipulation of the strings. Henry Cowell⁷ collectively described these pianistic extended techniques in which sound is produced by direct manipulation of the strings instead of (or in addition to) striking the piano's keys. Pioneered by Cowell in the 1920s, these techniques are now often called upon in the works of many avant-garde classical music composers.⁸ These techniques are used in the following compositions: George Crumb: *Makrokosmos, Volumes I and II* (Music and Arts 1044) which includes a number of pieces featuring string piano techniques (performed by artists such as Jo Boatright); Henry Cowell: *A Continuum Portrait, Vol. 1* which includes *Irish Suite* for string piano and small orchestra (performed by Continuum, Joel Sachs–conductor, Cheryl Seltzer–piano, Naxos 8.559192); Henry Cowell's *A Continuum Portrait, Vol. 2* which includes *Piece for Piano with Strings* and *The Banshee* (performed by Cheryl Seltzer, Naxos 8.559193)
- Whistling, singing or talking into the piano.
- Silently depressing one or more keys, allowing the corresponding strings to vibrate freely, thus creating a kind of reverb effect.
- Techniques based upon using glissando⁹ on the piano strings. Techniques include the following: finger-tip glissandos, nail glissandos, glissandos upward and downward, performing glissandos in front of and behind shock absorbers, glissandos along strings, and pizzicati.
- Other techniques involve using a combination of high pitches. They are often utilized in combination with pressing the keys and in combination with scratching the bass strings. Crumb's “*Sea Themeglissando*” from *Voice of the Whale* requires rapid glissando over a string with the performer's finger tip.
- Percussive use of different parts of the piano, such as the outer rim. Luciano Berio Cavaliere di Gran Croce Omri¹⁰ is noted for his experimental work with this extended technique (in particular his composition entitled “*Sinfonia for voices and orchestra*” from 1968 and his series of numbered solo pieces entitled *Sequenza*).
- Microtones produced by using the palms of the hands or the fists—or indeed other body parts—to strike the keys. Charles Edward Ives¹¹ is widely regarded as one of the first American composers of international significance. His wide-ranging compositional techniques included the exploration of polytonality, polyrhythm, tone clusters, aleatoric elements, and quarter tones. For example, his *Three Quarter Tone Piano Pieces* (1923–24)¹² explore

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extended_technique

⁴ John Milton Cage (September 5, 1912 – August 12, 1992) was an American composer, philosopher, poet, music theorist, artist, printmaker and amateur mycologist and mushroom collector.

⁵ George Crumb (October 24, 1929) is an American composer of modern and avant-garde music.

⁶ <http://www.lunanova.org/PianoET/>

⁷ Henry Cowell (March 11, 1897 – December 10, 1965) was an American composer, music theorist, pianist, teacher, publisher, and impresario.

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/String_piano

⁹ Moving fingers rapidly over keys.

¹⁰ Luciano Berio, Cavaliere di Gran Croce OMRI (October 24, 1925 – May 27, 2003) was an Italian composer.

¹¹ Charles Edward Ives (October 20, 1874 – May 19, 1954) was an American modernist composer.

¹² Cowell, Henry; Sidney (1969). *Charles Ives and His Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

these techniques. His *Piano Sonata No. 2, Concord, Mass., 1840-60* (commonly known as the *Concord Sonata*) is one of the composer's best-known and most highly regarded pieces. In the second movement, a cluster chord is created by depressing the piano keys with a 14 3/4" piece of wood.

- Foot techniques can be summarized as follows: using the pedal for releasing a medium tone; starting an echo by using the right pedal; starting an echo by using keys which received a silent impulse; and the addition of a pedal in combination.
- Bowing the strings with bundles of fishing line (first introduced by John Cage).

Other European composers who make heavy use of extended techniques include the following: Luigi Nono, Luciano Berio, Helmut Lachenmann, Salvatore Sciarrino, Heinz Holliger, Carlo Forlivesi and Georgia Sopiropoulos.¹³

Many Turkish composers who have explored the use of these techniques. Extended piano techniques are used in Hasan Uçarsu's ¹⁴*Bir Yaz Yolculuğundan Arta Kalanlar - 4 Antik Kentin Öyküsü İngilizcesi*; Ertuğrul Oğuz Fırat's¹⁵ many piano compositions; Emre Dündar's *Derbeder İngilizcesi* (chained prepared piano), Mesruh Savaş's¹⁶ *Biçimsiz Yansımalar* İngilizcesi for flute and piano and *Le Chant des Voyelles* (2009). In addition, various Turkish pianists perform those compositions in their concert repertoires. Extended techniques may be found, for instance, in Fazıl Say's¹⁷ *Black Earth*. Also Turkish pianist Toros Can performs the compositions of George Crumb, and he has a record entitled *Piano Works* which features these compositions for *l'imperiale digitale*.

Although composers in Turkey employ these techniques in their works, the practice is not common among piano performance students in conservatories, even if they regularly perform twentieth-century music. Some composition and performance majors in Turkish conservatories are aware of these unusual techniques while others are not at all knowledgeable about the subject. The overall problem regarding the lack of use of these skills on the piano currently exists because extended piano techniques are not well known among these conservatory students. The purpose of the present study is to investigate developments regarding the use of new piano techniques. The researcher investigated whether these skills are practical for piano majors at conservatories and if could be widely used in Turkey.

2. Method

Ten randomly selected piano professors from fourteen state conservatories in Turkey (which offer studies in classic music) were interviewed for this investigation. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted via phone and face-to-face during the months of August and September, 2009. Content analysis was used as the analysis method.

3. Findings

According to the data of semi-structured interview questions findings analyze in four groups.

3.1. Application of extended techniques piano repertoire in Turkish conservatoires

According to the data from five conservatories (P1, P2, P5, P7, P8), extended piano techniques are not performed. According to the three other participants (P4, P9, P10), these techniques are rarely performed. P1 also indicated that students are not familiar with extended piano techniques and the piano repertoire which utilizes these techniques.

According to data from P3, only students at an advanced level perform these compositions at concerts and competitions. However, data indicates that a piano student at the third grade of high school (P6) performed George Crumb's *Little Suite for Christmas* (A.D. 1979). A graduate student performed *Black Angels* composed by the

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_musical_pieces_which_use_extended_techniques

¹⁴ Hasan Uçarsu Turkish composer born in İstanbul in 1965.

¹⁵ Ertuğrul Oğuz Fırat: (b.1923) a Turkish intellectual who has various works in the fields of literature, plastic arts, and music polyphonic music.

¹⁶ A young composer born in 1978.

¹⁷ Fazıl Say (b.1970) Turkish pianist and composer.

same composer. According to P9, students said that they had used extended techniques because works composed by members of their composition department had been performed.

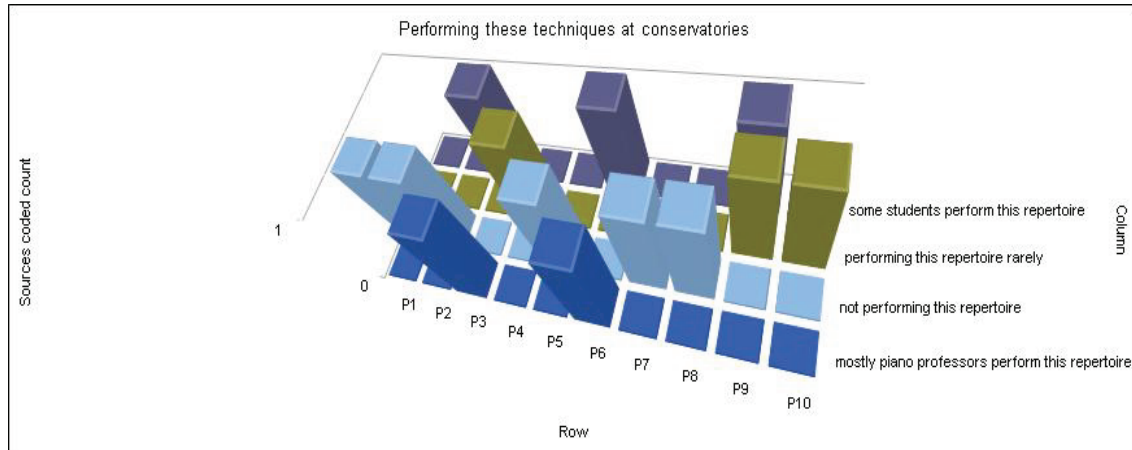


Figure 1. Application of extended piano techniques piano repertoire in Turkish conservatoires

According to the participants, extended techniques should be taught based on the repertoire that will be performed on stage (P10); students should apply these techniques depending on the composition selected and in accordance with the instructions of the composers (P2); and education is a phenomenon directly related to teachers (P3).

According to the data, three piano teachers performed compositions utilizing these techniques and included them in their concert programs. George Crumb's *Makrokosmos* (1972-3) and Mesruh Savaş's *Bıçimsız Yansımalar* for flute and piano can be counted among the compositions performed.

3.2. How professors at Turkish conservatories approach the use of extended piano techniques

According to the data, the opinions of participants regarding extended techniques can be outlined as follows: Only one of the participants (P5) is of the opinion that the use of these techniques is not advisable because he regards piano as a tempered instrument and its microtones are irreconcilable with this concept. Other participants (P2, P7, P9, P10) shared the opinion that teaching these techniques was not necessary. They indicated that it should not be difficult to perform selected pieces based on the instructions of the composers, and that special training was not necessary. They added, however, that students should be familiar with these techniques and the repertoire comprised of compositions containing these techniques. Other participants (P1, P3, P6, P8) stated that piano repertoire using these techniques should be taught and performed because the music was regularly performed on international stages.

Many participants indicated that knowledge of repertoire using extended techniques would produce positive effects on students. It would improve students' vision (P1, P2, P3) and provide data with a high frequency. These skills enable students to approach piano playing techniques from a different angle (P2, P8). The study of this repertoire produces a positive effect on expression and awareness of differences while eliminating suspicions about the repertoire after performing and listening (P2). It likewise improves creativity (P4, P8). These techniques involve an unorthodox use of the piano and allow students to be more creative regarding their playing. It also offers students the possibility of performing a different repertoire (P7). These techniques are relatively new and allow students to keep abreast of and to practice new techniques.

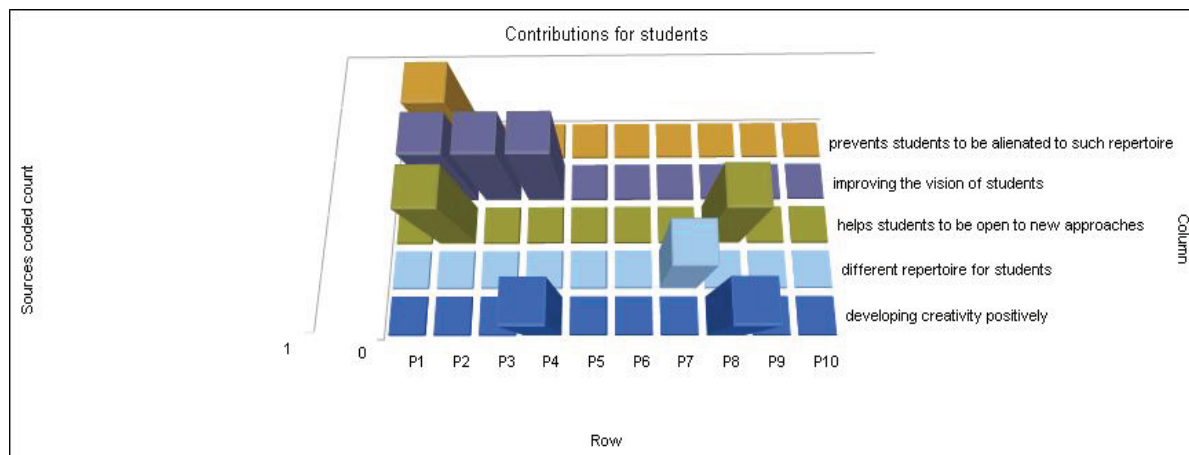


Figure 2. Extended piano techniques positive contributions for piano students

Students' opinions about these techniques are categorized as follows according to the data: students who practice these techniques use them due to their personal interests (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10); according to P3, some students are interested in them while others remain indifferent and do not want to perform this repertoire; in addition, P7 and P1 said that students often adopt negative attitude because they are not familiar with this repertoire due to insufficient training and therefore do not want to perform it.

3.3. Difficulties in performing such repertoire

According to the data, extended piano techniques are not widely practiced due to the following reasons: The most frequently cited reason is the lack of extended piano techniques piano repertoire sheet music (P1, P4, P5, P7). It is extremely difficult to find related manuscripts even if people desire to perform or listen to the music. Photocopies are used for performing some pieces because they have not been published. Another high-frequency reason is the lack of suitable pianos (P1, P5, P6, P7). These pieces are usually composed for grand pianos which are not used in studies, or these works cannot be performed on every grand piano because they have been composed for specific types of pianos.

An analysis of additional data (following the highest frequency responses) demonstrates that another frequent problem is that teachers are not familiar with extended techniques and therefore cannot effectively apply them (P5, P7, P8). Reasons with a lesser frequency include the following: references to the broadness and depth of the piano repertoire (P2, P7); students do not have the required skills to perform such pieces (P5, P7); and the lack of access to such piano repertoires (P2, P4). It was stated that this repertoire could not be included in undergraduate programs due to its broadness and depth. It was established that only graduate students with required skills could perform this repertoire. Another reason was difficulties faced in accessing composers and their compositions in spite of a desire to perform them.

The reasons with the lowest frequency included the following: the lack of information about contemporary composers using these techniques (P4); the necessity to work with the composer (P1) in order to perform the work effectively; and difficulties in verifying that the techniques were accurately performed (P3) and the difficulties encountered while performing these techniques (P6). Although such pieces usually provide instructions written by their composers, they are usually performed by working together with the composer. However, it is often difficult to access all composers, and judging a performance can be a problem if the performer has not worked with the composer. In addition, coordination problems are experienced when performing those pieces. The piano has to be prepared for such pieces because they often modify the piano and many details in the notes should be carefully reviewed.

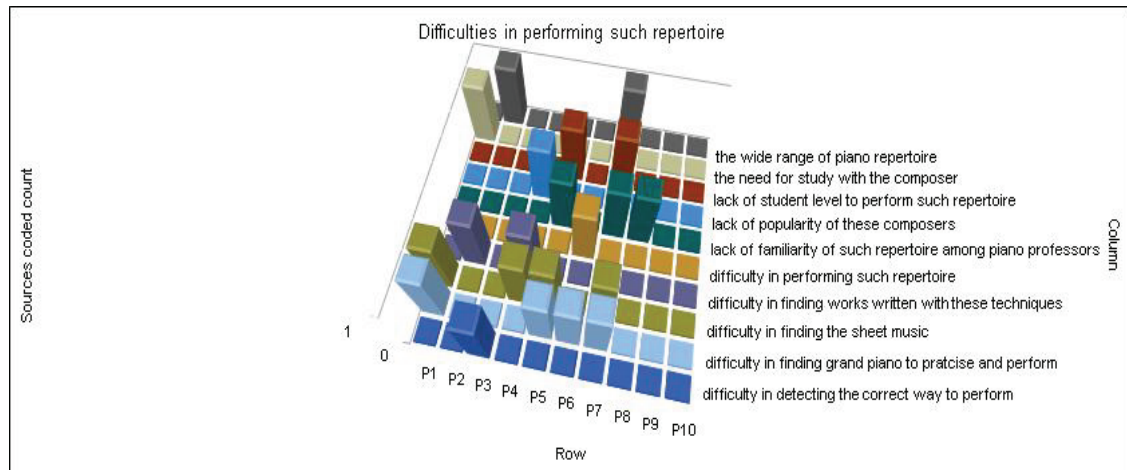


Figure 3. Difficulties in performing such repertoire

3.4. Solutions recommended by participants

Participants of the study proposed the following solutions for ensuring that a piano repertoire using these techniques is performed more widely in Turkey: The solution with the highest frequency was to include these techniques in the curriculum (P1, P2, P3, P8). It was demonstrated that these techniques could be taught in a suitable class, including “Music of the 20th Century” (P2), a class called “Improvisation”, or another new class in the revised curriculum (P3, P8). It was suggested that each student should be required to perform pieces composed by one Turkish and one contemporary composer in each semester in the undergraduate curriculum (P3, P4). It was recommended that one of these contemporary compositions include extended piano techniques.

The participants stated that increasing the popularity of the extended-techniques phenomenon is the most important approach in making its use more common in Turkey (P9). Thus, it was suggested that talented and successful performers should include these pieces in their concerts, and these works should also be promoted through workshops and seminars. It was stated that raising awareness of these works would eventually eliminate other shortcomings. For example, many students took an interest in extended techniques only after attending Toros Can's concerts, as students usually go to performances of highly popular players (P9). It was suggested that joint concerts should be organized, and that analyses of different composers and pieces would encourage the composition of higher quality pieces which should be listened to and analyzed by taking a critical approach (P10). Participants indicated that students who are interested in these techniques should be supported by their instructors and guided properly (P2).

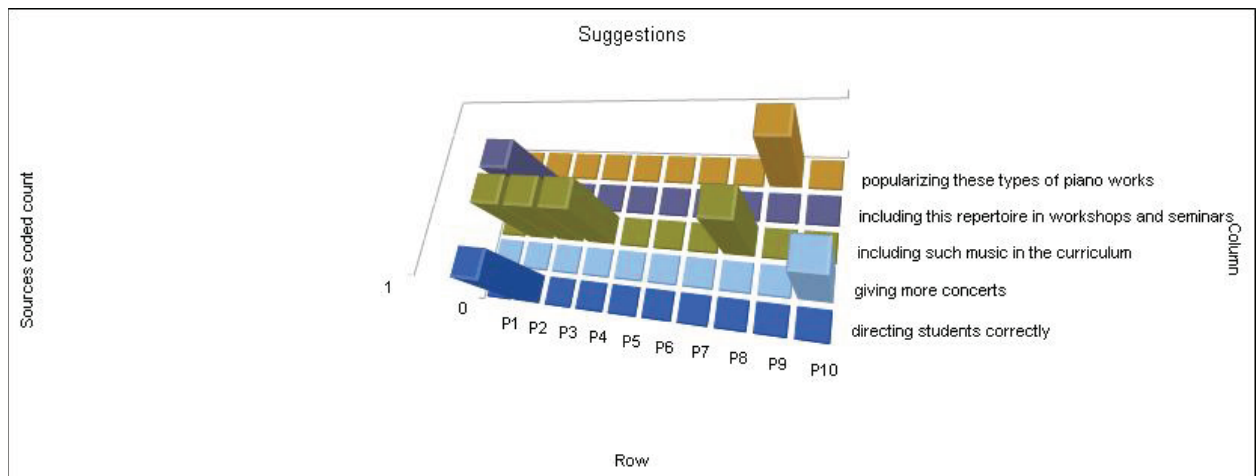


Figure 4. Suggestions

4. Discussion

The data from this study suggests that extended techniques should be promoted in order to ensure that they are applied on a wider scale. Extended-technique repertoire should, therefore, be included in concerts, workshops, and seminars. A repertoire comprising these techniques should be included in concerts and curricula in parallel with training. The only source currently written in Turkish about extended piano techniques is Serla Balkarlı Can's dissertation entitled "*John Cage's "Prepared Piano" and Indonesian Traditional Orchestra "Gamelan"*" which was submitted for proficiency in the arts. In her dissertation, Can provides structured information about the prepared piano techniques of John Cage, and she examines his life and the books, works, and musical trends in which he was involved (including The New York School and details about the concept of the prepared piano). There is no source which investigates and explains how those techniques are taught to performers. There are, however, many foreign publications highlighting these techniques. They explain how these techniques are used, and these studies are usually organized in sections about composers associated with techniques involving string piano or prepared piano. There is currently no source which discussed how these techniques can be applied and taught in conservatories.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

As the data from this study indicates, eighty (80) percent of the respondents indicated that extended piano techniques are not played or seldom played at conservatories located in Turkey. At twenty percent of conservatories, piano repertoire that included extended techniques has been played by both teachers and students. It was determined that the usage rate of these techniques was not very high at any conservatory in Turkey.

Although these techniques are not widely available in piano training and repertoire, ninety percent of music educators have a positive point of view regarding these techniques. According to the forty percent of participants, it is essential to study and acknowledge piano repertoire including these techniques. Forty percent of participants stated that the teaching of these techniques is not a necessary curricular component, indicating that students playing such music can learn extended piano techniques while preparing for performances. According to the data, ninety percent of participants believe that the study of piano works which apply these techniques should be dependent upon a student's interest in this repertoire. Sixty percent of participants claimed that extended techniques have positive effects upon students regarding their musical development. Some of the positive effects which appeared as a result of practicing extended piano techniques included the following: the development of a wider musical perspective and vision of students; an increase in students' openness to musical innovations while developing greater familiarity with the repertoire utilizing these techniques; and enhancing the creativity of students.

According to the data from this study, the primary reasons avoiding the use of extended-techniques repertoire relate to difficulties encountered at the stage of application. The problems are listed from highest frequency to the lowest:

- Difficulties experienced in acquiring extended piano repertoire sheets
- Problems related to the availability of suitable pianos
- The lack of familiarity with such repertoire among piano instructors
- Ignorance of this repertoire among instructors and students due to the wide range of piano repertoire
- The lack of the necessary level of ability by students to perform such repertoire
- The absence of recognition and acknowledgement of musical works in this repertoire and the relatively low number of compositions
- The lack of popularity in Turkey of composers who write compositions using these techniques
- The appearance of difficulties during the preparation of such works (particularly regarding the accuracy of performance practices)
- Difficulties encountered in the performance of these techniques and repertoire
- The necessity of collaborating with composers to prepare a successful performance of a composition

The basic reason for the lack of attention given to extended piano techniques is the lack of recognition and knowledge of this unique repertoire. Suggested solutions for the inclusion these techniques during the academic term in conservatories include the following:

- The inclusion of courses in the piano curriculum at conservatories which provide for the study of extended piano techniques (as a separate course or teaching such skills in piano lessons)
- The organization of workshops and seminars about extended piano techniques
- The encouragement of instructors for piano students at conservatories to include these works in concert programs.

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